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PROGRAM All Things Considered

STATION WETA Radio  
NPR Network

DATE July 20, 1982 5:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT British Spy Story

NOAH ADAMS: Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has her hands full this week: IRA violence, palace security problems, and now a new spy scandal. The last major spy scandal erupted when Sir Anthony Blount, the famous art historian, was exposed as a Soviet spy and stripped of his knighthood.

But as NPR's Robert Siegel reports from London, this case is very different from the Blount affair.

ROBERT SIEGEL: This is one British spy story that does not seem to leap from the pages of a John LeCarre novel. So far, it involves no public school boys turned wartime spies and cold war spy masters. It has less to do with cloaks and daggers than with computers and long-range antennae.

The leak was at GCHQ, Governemnt Communications Headquarters, in Cheltenham (?), about 95 miles northwest of London. It's the equivalent of our National Security Administration, intercepting foreign communications and storing the data gathered in computers.

The only person charged in this story is 44-year-old Geoffrey Arthur Prine (?), who worked at GCHQ after leaving the Royal Air Force in 1968 until 1977. He was arraigned last Thursday for violating Britain's Official Secrets Act. At his arraignment, the prosecution said that he'd passed information to others, information that could have been useful to an enemy. The prosecution cited acts committed from 1968 until 1981, well after Prine had left GCHQ.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher made a statement about the case to the House of Commons today, but the statement turned